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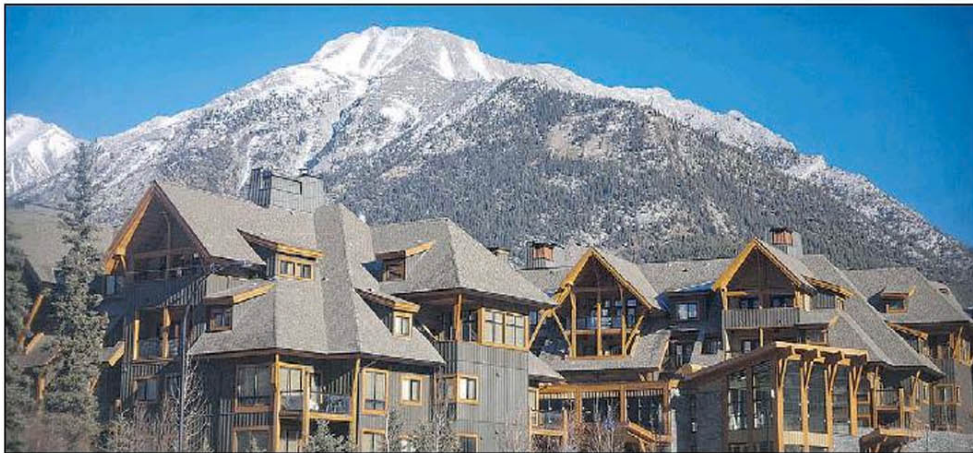
• SATURDAY, AUGUST 28, 2010

RECREATION & INVESTMENT PROPERTIES

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Photos courtesy Bellstar Hotels & Resorts

Bellstar Hotels & Resorts' Solara Resort & Spa is nestled in the picturesque Rocky Mountain town of Canmore.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

LOCATION: Canmore, Alta., 104 kilometres from Calgary city centre on the Trans-Canada Highway
AMENITIES TO BE DEVELOPED BY MID-2011: Conference centre, holistic health spa, pool and hot tub, restaurant, deli, coffee shop, convenience store, fitness centre and 200-seat theatre
CURRENT SALES PHASE INCLUDES: 106 one-, two- and three-bedroom suites, ranging from 705 to 1,780 square feet
NEARBY ATTRACTIONS: Canmore Nordic Centre; Kananaskis Country; Banff National Park; Nakiska, Lake Louise, Mount Norquay and Sunshine Village.

Solara rises and shines on Canmore

BY ROB PETKAU
FOR THE CALGARY HERALD

Bellstar Hotels & Resorts has taken firm command of the embattled Solara Resort & Spa in Canmore, and is weeks away from re-launching real estate sales at the luxury development.

"We're finishing up the resort first — we're completing the reception area and a sales centre right now," says Ed Romanowski, president and CEO of Bellstar. "There are 106 units left, and we're going to re-launch them to the public Sept. 4."

Construction of the \$135-million resort stalled in 2008, when previous developers went into receivership. In collaboration with its financial partners, Bellstar purchased the resort in May, and the company is hard at work completing what its predecessors started.

"We saw it as an opportunity for us to pick up the pieces of a great concept, put it all together and bring it back into the marketplace at a reasonable price, and in a way that complements our other operations in Canmore."

Bellstar operates the Blackstone Mountain Lodge and Lodges at Canmore, which are adjacent to Solara, as well as Mystic Springs Chalets & Hot Pools, located a few hundred metres away.



The Solara living room is stylishly designed for comfort and ambience.

Once Solara's reception and sales areas are complete, crews will get to work on the construction of the 38,000-square-foot amenity buildings.

The meeting rooms and conference centre will be complete in December, with the holistic health spa, pools and food and beverage facilities to follow early next year.

"This will be a full-service

resort. It'll have amenities for families — play areas and water features for children and a 200-seat theatre, as well as the more sophisticated spa and conference centre. There haven't been many resorts built like that in Canmore," Romanowski says.

The resort's 214 suites are finished and generously equipped, with cork flooring, stone countertops, extensive millwork and

lit, coffered ceilings in the living rooms. "They're furnished with tasteful throw rugs, sleigh beds and high-end appliances in the gourmet kitchens. The entire development has a culinary arts twist to it, from the in-suite cooking facilities to the way the food and beverage operations run," he says.

[SEE SOLARA, PAGE III](#)

SOLARA: Canmore's eclectic nature

About half of the suites are still for sale — with penthouses, one-, two- and three-bedroom layouts and a variety of views of Canmore's world-famous natural beauty available.

Three of the units will be sold in fractions, with full ownership available on the other 103.

"That's originally how it was structured, and with the market right now, consumers who are buying are largely buying whole units.

"But we've left it open so we could offer more fractions if the market response is not as strong for the full units," Romanowski says.

The suites range from 705 to 1,780 square feet, and the high \$200,000s to the low \$600,000s for full ownership.

Owners also have the option of putting their units in the resort's rental pool.

Solara is a 10-minute walk from Canmore's bustling main street.

And while the resort is a great fit with the town's already extensive resort culture, Romanowski likes the development because its style is distinctive.

"It isn't more of the mountains, more of the stone and more of the timber. It's actually got a contemporary flair to it. In terms of colours and lighting, all of the decor make it very unique in the Canmore setting," he explains.

"It's also very luxurious within the units, and that extends out into the hallways, where again the lighting the millwork are all quite elegant, and into the public areas, the clubhouse and all the



The gourmet kitchen boasts high-end appliances.

Photos courtesy Bellstar Hotels & Resorts

amenities.

"The luxury is throughout."

Having been involved in the community for more than two decades, Romanowski is an ardent supporter of Canmore.

"The character of the shopping, the downtown and the dining area is very different from Banff.

"The scale is quite human; there isn't a lot of traffic. In many respects, I find the environment of Canmore to be more park-like than it is in Banff," he explains.

"It might be the eclectic nature that comes from the differences in age and heritage of the town — from its mining community age to what it is now as a major destination for outdoor recreation."

The walking trails that connect the downtown area to the mountains, and to the community's other neighbourhoods, are also quite special.

"Nobody would have envisioned 20 or 25 years ago that there would be 5,000 or 10,000 units of resort recreational de-

velopment in Canmore. But because it's somewhat spread out into nodes, the community still has quite a small-town feel to it."

Calgarians sometimes overlook Canmore for the very reason they should cherish it, he says.

"I think that proximity is so important. Being on a divided highway and literally within an hour of most of Calgary is quite important," he says. "And, of course, its proximity to Calgary and to four world-class ski hills shouldn't be understated."



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ED ROMANOWSKI, BELLSTAR HOTELS & RESORTS